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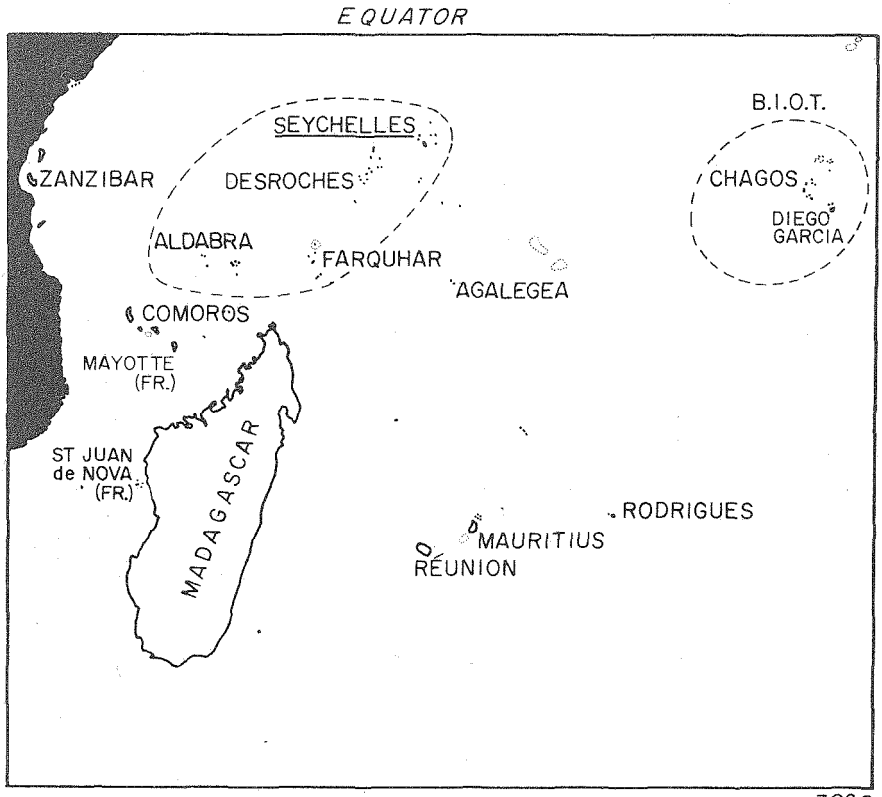

Africa and the Islands of the Western Indian Ocean

Philip M. Allen
John M. Ostheimer

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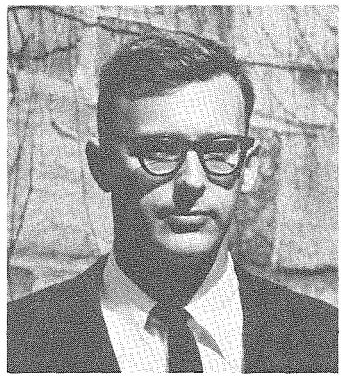
PREFACE

The dramatic changes in the Indian Ocean were recently highlighted for me by a visit to the Seychelles at the time of their independence. In contrast with 1953, when there were no air connections and one arrived on the mail ship from Mombasa to Bombay, half a dozen airlines now have regular and charter services, bringing thousands of tourists from Europe and South Africa.

In the 1950s Mahé, the principal island, fitted Evelyn Waugh's description of it as the place "Where the Clock Chimes Twice," which referred to the remindful town clock that struck the hour again for those too somnolent to hear it the first time. Mahé was a sleepy island with little education, a poor economy, and fewer prospects than when it had been part of the French Empire. Now it bustles with new hotels. The outer islands are also attracting tourists: Bird Island for its colorful and rare avian species, and Praslin for its "x-rated" double coconut, or coco-de-mer, which has been called the most obscene vegetable in the world. But even this designation has now been changed, and nubile hotel clerks wear miniature replicas of the coconut and advertise the Seychelles as the "love islands."

Political change has also come to almost all of the islands of the Western Indian Ocean. An Iranian navy task force was visiting the Seychelles while I was there, evidence of the growing strength and political ambitions of the Shah's oil-rich state.

The competition and confrontation of the superpowers in the islands and on the adjacent land masses make the Indian Ocean a critical area for the 1980s. After Israel's Entebbe raid it was the British-American listening post on Diego Garcia that first learned of General Amin's overtures to Somalia for a joint attack on Kenya. To analyze the new situation in the Indian Ocean, we have found two experienced scholars with extensive field research in the area.



John Ostheimer has taught political science at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff since 1967. Educated at Yale, he lectured at the University College in Dar-es-Salaam in the mid-1960s. A Fulbright-Hayes Research Fellowship took him to the Indian Ocean in 1973, and led to the editing of a book, Politics of the Western Indian Ocean and Islands (New York: Praeger, 1975), as well as to articles on Seychelles and Comorian politics.

Philip M. Allen served as political officer at the American Embassy in Madagascar with responsibilities also for several other islands. He has traveled the Western Indian Ocean five times in the last six years. His works include Traveler's Africa (with Aaron Segal, 1973), Self-Determination in the Western Indian Ocean (1966), and numerous articles. Dr. Allen, formerly the African American Institute's regional representative for French-speaking Africa, now lives in Vermont, where he teaches at Johnson State College, farms, and writes.

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Edwin S. Munger

INTRODUCTION

Most of Africa's islands have only recently begun to attract notice as they dropped anticlimactically from the leaking bucket of European colonial rule. They have lain in no one's particularly puissant shadow since the end of sailing days. Thus far they have proved ineligible for the capricious favors of the offshore petroleum prospector, and for the most part seem endowed with no known resource more precious than people. Among these islands, four new states separated from Britain, France, and Portugal during 1975-1976 -- two on the eastern seaboard, two on the western -- and all four have complex geographical, political, economic, and cultural problems. To what degree do the citizens of the Seychelles, the Comoros, Cape Verde, and São Tomé consider themselves part of Africa? How "African" are they regarded as being by others? What enduring relations have they conducted historically with the continent? Will they obtain advantages through political consultation, economic interdependence, and other forms of close cooperation with the OAU African community? Or do they stand to enhance their security, development opportunities, and social growth rather by reorientation toward other states, including former metropoles, major powers, and "third world" trail-blazers, or even toward one another?

From the scholar's viewpoint, the emergence of fragile new island states raises similar questions. Should such far-flung polities be included in broad coverage of African affairs, or rather as part of another, or even separate, world subsystem? What "region," if any, embraces the Cape Verdes and São Tomé? Is there any reason to posit the reality of a "Western Indian Ocean" region? Ultimately, how do the tests of geographical coherence or plebescites apply to seasonally populated or predominantly European insular societies on the African periphery, such as those of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), St. Helena, Ascension, Madeira, and the Canaries?

Students of African politics and society have treated the African periphery inconsistently. Some texts deal only with the continental territories plus Zanzibar and Macias Nguema Biyogo (Fernando Po), islands that share statehood with continental units. The Malagasy Republic (Madagascar) and Mauritius, thanks to their long-standing OAU membership, manage to make the usual lists of African states, but have seldom gone beyond that stage with real

participation in African affairs. Few treatises and none of the major African periodicals deal regularly with the more obscure islands. One popular recent text, which insists on its inclusiveness, considers the appropriate purview of African politics to embrace "the offshore islands of Cape Verde, Fernando Po, Madagascar, Mauritius, Zanzibar, the Comoros, and others. . . ."[1] meaning, presumably, the Canaries, São Tomé, Madeira, St. Helena, Ascension, the Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion, and the BIOT, though none of these places receives specific mention. In fact, few of the islands are ever referred to again in that text: the three Indian Ocean dependencies, the Comoros, Réunion and the Seychelles were not listed in the book's statistical appendix, though the remaining colonial territories on the continent were there, as were Madagascar and Mauritius.[2] Another text, entitled All Africa[3], omits all the islands except Madagascar and Zanzibar. The invaluable annual Africa Contemporary Record[4] treats (through 1975) all states and dependencies in alphabetical order, except for the Canaries, Madeira, St. Helena, Ascension, and the BIOT.

Far from seeking to impose geographical or phenomenological boundaries on Africa, the present discussion is intended primarily to clarify the relationships of the Indian Ocean islands with the mainland. It is perhaps inevitable that such insular microstates will draw attention to themselves in proportion to their conformity with geographically perceived continental patterns; thus when strongly in the exception (as, for instance, when Réunion is accepted as part of metropolitan France, or the Seychelles or the Canaries as "white," or the BIOT as uninhabited, or Ascension as too distant, except for staging C-130 flights to Kisangani) they may simply be overlooked. The student of "regional" problems can choose to include or ignore the islands, depending on whether their characteristics confirm his hypothesis. Surely none of the "new" island societies will ever play a role in Africa comparable to nineteenth-century Zanzibar, whose sultan, it was said, piped tunes that caused dancing at the lakes. But then, Zanzibar is a true "offshore island," integrated by necessity into African affairs.

The very concept of "offshore island," meaningful in juxtaposition to major continental powers, as in the Caribbean or Chinese seas, applies with some attenuation to Cape Verde and São Tomé, but loses its utility on the higher seas of the Zanj. Africa's evanescent continental shadow often fails to cover the Seychelles, the Comoros, Mauritius, Réunion, and the BIOT. Even Madagascar, for somewhat different reasons, has kept its distance from the mainland, only 250 miles away. In this zone of transition and contradiction, Africans may decide whether their aura shall extend to obscure insular neighbors, and the islands are reciprocally obliged to contrive terms for their own integration into, or ostracism from, the African collectivity.

Yet although one may contemplate African affairs without considering the islands, the converse is nearly impossible today. The African matrix is gradually absorbing insular situations, notwithstanding the fragility of the overwater connections, the preoccupations of African leaders, and the uncertainties and delusions of the islanders concerning their conflicting international affinities. The process

AFRICA'S ISLANDS: SELECTED BASIC DATA

Indian Ocean Islands	(A) Population (in 1000's) 1975 year-end	(B) Surface Area (km^2)	(C) Population Density per km^2 (1973)	(D) Annual Rate of Population Increase	(E) Life Expectancy at Birth male/female	(F) Per Capita Income
British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)	2	78	26	n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Comoro Islands	303	2,171	134	2.4	n.a. n.a.	$90 (1963)
Madagascar	7,180 (1973)	587,041	n.a.	n.a.	37.5 38.3 (1966)	$131 (1970)
Mauritius	876	2,045	424	1.3	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Mauritius Island	841	1,865	448	1.0	58.7 61.9 (1961-63)	$299 (1972)
Rodrigues Island	35	109	n.a.	n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Other Islands	n.a.	71	n.a.	n.a.	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Réunion	490	2,510	189	2.1	55.8 62.4 (1963-67)	$546 (1963)
Seychelles	58	376	149	2.6	61.9 68.00 (1970-72)	n.a.
Atlantic Ocean Islands	**1973 mid-year est.**					
Cape Verde Islands	284		70	1.8	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Equatorial Guinea	298		11	1.5	41.0 (1965-70)	n.a.
Fernando Po Island (Macias Nguema Biyogo)	81		40	0.4	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
Rio Muni (mainland)	217		8	1.9	n.a. n.a.	n.a.
São Tomé e Principe	78		81	2.0	n.a. n.a.	n.a.

Sources: A: Colin Legum, ed., Africa Contemporary Record (1975-76)
A-E: United Nations, Demographic Yearbook (1973)
F: United Nations, Statistical Yearbook (1973)

n.a.: not applicable

is surer in the case of the two new Atlantic nations (Cape Verde and São Tomé) than for the Canaries, Madeira, or any of the diverse Indian Ocean groups.

In a world of tightening interdependence and shifting alignments, compact territorial mass correlates with national power. Hence, newly sovereign small archipelagoes with few proven natural endowments, and with sociologically shallow national traditions, are not only threatened with unviability but must somehow create national identities and international affinities out of skimpy whole cloth. Barring a loss of integrity through merger with a larger nation -- probable for Cape Verde, possible for São Tomé, unlikely for the Seychelles and the Comoros -- all four floating polities seek security through maximum feasible participation in the United Nations and its relevant organisms and through other specialized sources of assistance. Their present regimes are only mildly attracted by new "third world" constellations gravitating out of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) or nonaligned power concerts, and are relatively immune to most appeals for universal militancy, whether issued by Chinese, Cuban, or Arab sources. Continued close association with the former metropole seems assured only for the Seychelles, both bilaterally with Britain and through the Commonwealth network. The Comoros may yet choose among the usual formal lanes of access opened by France to its more complaisant ex-colonies (Franc Zone monetary stability, modest bilateral aid, primarily in technical assistance directed toward the prosperity of French institutions, EEC association through the Lomé treaty, membership in the Francophone association and the African and Malagasy Common Services Organization [OCAM]), but the Comorian-France nexus has been seriously weakened since 1975. Intimations of Comorian adherence to the Arab League, though bolstered by a development loan worth $500,000, appear unrealistic for the time being, particularly while the implications of Comorian military base concessions to France remain unclear. Comparable affiliation with Lisbon and Europe seems at best a symbolic option for the Cape Verdes and São Tomé unless a coherent Portuguese community develops out of the frenzied dismemberment of the ancient empire that began in 1974.

Although membership in the OAU and related African associations was virtually automatic for all four new insular states, the extent of their participation in the African system, or in regional subsystems, remains doubtful. This issue belongs at a central point in the "identity-affinity" crisis discussed in the present paper. None of the cooperative "clubs" based in Dakar, Lagos, Abidjan, or Yaoundé seems made to order for Cape Verdean or São Toméan adhesion, and the East African complex appears unpromisingly "continental" for the islands. Western Indian Ocean regionalism awaits leadership initiatives from a domestically preoccupied Madagascar, though certain cultural, transportation, and tourist links have been deeded to the islands by France.[5]

The essential African orientation of the Cape Verdean and São Toméan nations seems assured by their (admittedly passive) association in decolonizing the Portuguese empire. Part of the Cape Verdean elite helped found the Partido Africando da Independencia da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) in Bissau, and is now in a position to draw the entire archipelago for the first time into a binding political relationship

with the mainland. Although the island majority is strongly of Portuguese ethnic and cultural persuasion, leading Cape Verdeans have been "joining Africa" for decades and their nation has little choice but to follow suit.

São Tomé e Principe has remained beyond the sightlines of African self-determination since the extinction of the Atlantic slave trade, except for brief reappearances during UN forced-labor investigations in the 1950s and the Biafran logistical campaigns of the late 1960s. Like Macao and Timor, this least embattled of Portugal's erstwhile dominions suddenly found itself part of a systematic decolonization campaign operated by Lisbon's new revolutionary regime. Expatriate São Toméans, long distracted by more dramatic or purely personal causes elsewhere, hastily confected a "liberation movement" based, however improbably, in nearby Gabon. From there, they presided over belated agitation on the islands. A half-milennium of connection between São Tomé and Angola had been determined largely by labor migrations, initially in the westerly direction where central African slaves were dispatched for Brazil and Lisbon as well as for the islands' own cocoa, coffee, and sugar plantations. These movements later reversed toward the east, once Angola was proclaimed a settlers' promised land. Despite a degree of "creolization" in São Toméan culture, the main ethnic bonds still extend to Angola, and in modern times São Tomé has stood conveniently as a stage in air and sea communications between Portugal and its favored colony. Whether or not Angola and São Tomé will be able to develop their historic ties, the people of Africa's smallest state (until the Seychelles' 1976 independence) possess a fundamental "Africaneity" within their ponderous heritage of subordination to Europe. For overriding political reasons, São Tomé and Principe, like the Cape Verdes, are destined to become integral parts of Africa.

Such reasons are hard to find in the Western Indian Ocean, and the European vectors remain commensurately stronger. The Seychelles literally descend from Britain; the Comoros retain a unique identity midway between Zanzibar and France. Unlike Portugal, Britain and France demonstrate both the capacity and the desire to maintain postcolonial influence in these ex-colonies now that the vulnerability and the burdens of imperial power have slackened. Thus if Cape Verde and São Tomé have prospects for amphibious mergers with Guinea and Angola, respectively, following the not altogether joyful examples of Tanzania and Equatorial Guinea, the Indian Ocean societies are more inhibited by imperial legacy. Not for nothing did Europe's imperial publicists envision those seas as a political, economic, and cultural enclave. Now that the old imperialism has yielded the political ocean, but not all the rest, what are the relative merits of a new Great Power interest, in confrontation with Africa's claim to an offshore patrimony?

Comparable issues of identity were settled a decade or more ago for the African continental societies. Establishment of the OAU at Addis Ababa in 1963, followed a year later by the Cairo conference, secured the political cohesion of north and sub-Saharan Africa, with certain economic and cultural implications. The strategic reality of this bloc has been demonstrated in UN voting patterns and by critical allegiances in the Middle East and petroleum crises. The African

alliance has also successfully converted the welter of issues attending southern Africa into a quintessential claim for majority (that is, African) rights in minority-ruled territory.

An "afrotropic" tendency has only belatedly affected the Western Indian Ocean, even for Madagascar. Formerly included in the evolutionary strategies applied to West and Central Africa under the postwar French republics, Madagascar remained substantially aloof from involvement in African affairs throughout the Tsiranana period of independence (1960-1972). Only under the present regime has the essentially African situation of the Great Island been conceded, and, more important, effected in policy. The conversion has occurred under the inspiration of the present chief of state, Didier Ratsiraka, a young statesman of mixed Asian and African heritage whose contribution as Foreign Minister from 1972 through 1974 consisted mainly in a successful effort to demythologize Malagasy external affairs.

Farthest removed from Africa of all the larger islands, Mauritius has sought since attaining independence from Britain in 1968 to exploit her own ethnogeographical ambiguities in a positive sense. Policy under Prime Minister Seewoosagur Ramgoolam has been geared toward basic survival of a dense population against Malthusian odds. Thus, a Mauritius that is two-thirds Asian, and one-third Francophone Creole plays African roles in Africa and Francophonia, European roles in South Africa, the Middle East, and the Commonwealth, and Asian roles in Asia. With the replacement of Commonwealth economic bonds by increasingly formal EEC-African association, and confronted by prolonged incoherence in Asian power alignments, Mauritius today has little choice: it must protect its monocrop lifelines to sugar markets by reasserting an exceptional African status, much as Switzerland, Sweden, Iceland, and Turkey must remain exceptionally European.

The Malagasy and Mauritian experience provides a difficult example for the new polities of the Western Indian Ocean. The Seychelles, once a dependency of Mauritius, and the Comoros, once administered from Madagascar, do look for leads from these older, larger nations. But in practical terms, any reorientation toward Africa by such small-scale polities would involve rerouting trade and investment patterns and conforming to relatively neutralist attitudes toward strategic questions. Here the old metropoles, not entirely dissolved from the scene, and all major prospective sources of new aid, now sending navies into it, play an inhibiting role on policy. Moreover, Britain remains at least symbolically present as sovereign of the strategic maritime crumbs collectively known as the British Indian Ocean Territory, and is principal economic partner for the Seychelles as well as for Mauritius. France still governs Réunion, holds the lifeline for the Comorian economy, operates a diminished naval and air system through Djibouti-Comoros-Réunion, and enjoys the prestige of cultural metropole for all the Western Indian Ocean.

New power presence, for better or worse, represents a kind of chimera for the hungry new nations of the region. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union has acknowledged its interest sufficiently to warrant a genuine effort at aid and influence. Chinese, Indian, and Arab interests remain largely patronizing -- anticolonial to be sure, but without providing alternatives. The sophisticated

archipelagoes of the area have all been too entangled in European affairs to indulge in the solitary statehood of the Maldives to the northeast, and an autonomous bloc morphology among the western islands themselves requires benevolent guarantees from all the other interested powers. By default, then, the newly independent islands have nowhere to go but Africa.

THE ISLANDS AND AFRICA

Geography

Geographers naturally accept the westernmost Indian Ocean islands within the study boundaries of Africa.[6] Madagascar and the Comoros, both lying on the edge of the continental shelf, are judged by theorists of continental drift to have been a part of Africa until, perhaps, 150 million years ago. It is more difficult to include the Seychelles and the southern Mascarene islands (Réunion, Mauritius, and dependencies) within such theories: a deep trench separates the continental shelf from the Mascarene Ridge to the east, and Madagascar lies on its eastern edge. Nevertheless, 30 percent of the Seychelles' 85 islands have a unique red granite rock structure typical of the continental igneous form, thus supporting theories of an erstwhile connection between the African land mass and the Mascarene Ridge.

Of little or no importance to the monsoon-borne maritime traffic system that connects the Swahili African coast with Arab and Asian lands, most of the islands came into historical focus in the sixteenth century as intermediate points between Europe, the Cape of Good Hope, and the Indies. Once marine technology and Suez Canal routing tightened these sea-lanes, the islands relapsed into obscurity. Colonial policy proved predominantly bilateral, thus dissolving the few remaining links between the island dependencies and the African continent. Ocean traffic in the zone remains a European monopoly to this day, and air connections are only beginning to develop relatively autonomous, politically-inspired patterns, through East African Airways, Air Madagascar, Air Mauritius, and a few other third world carriers. The Seychelles and the Comoros lacked direct intercontinental air facilities until the 1970s, and if their new jetports bring these last of the islands much closer to Africa, it is still largely thanks to congruent communications interests of Britain and France. Most telecommunications also remain umbilically arranged via Paris and/or London.

Ethnicity

Only the westernmost islands, Madagascar and the four Comoros, were inhabited before the European occupation of the area, beginning in the seventeenth and eighteeenth centuries. Madagascar's population grew from large-scale invasions of Malayo-Polynesians and African boatmen on an originally Bushman base. The original Comorians may have also been Bushmen, but were overwhelmed by Bantu, and later by Arab-Shirazi, immigrants. The current populations of the other islands are entirely a function of European settlement and subsequent migrations of slave and contract labor. Most of the Comoros' 300,000 inhabitants

are African in appearance, and in George Murdock's classification[7] form part of the Swahili cluster of northeast coast Bantu. The Comorians are an Islamized people whose basic Bantu tribal identity has been culturally overlain by Arabization. Arabic remains nonetheless a scholarly minority language, with Swahili the Comorian lingua franca and Malagasy prominent on Mayotte, the archipelago's southernmost component. Ethnically, the Comorians are as much a part of Africa as are the Zanzibari or Wazaramu nearer the coast.

The Merina and Betsileo people of Madagascar's central plateau, the most obviously Malayan of the island's eighteen ethnic groups, are surrounded by more negroid coastal people (cotiers) who have traditionally provided slaves to the Asiatic Merina. The island's language, culture, and farming practices are strongly Malayan, but body structure, animal husbandry, and social organization have Bantu origins. Although religious and cultural practices have evolved considerably under island autonomy, it seems clear that the sea-borne Malayans dwelt for substantial periods of time on the African mainland before sailing to settle Madagascar.[8]

Disentangling African strands in the heritage of the other island populations presents even more of a problem. The 55,000 Seychellois are a homogenous mixture of types, with important, but by no means dominant, African ethnic contributions. According to Lionnet, "in the early population censuses of the Colony the inhabitants . . . could be classed according to their racial origin, but this was no longer possible by 1911 because the races had become so mixed."[9] Here and on Mauritius, the British bureaucracy developed the term "General Population" to distinguish the creolized Afro-Europeans from new accretions of Asians. As with ethnic characteristics, Seychellois culture and language represent genuine mixtures of African, French, and to a lesser degree English and South Asian features.

Well over 90 percent of the 450,000 Réunionnais are also "métis," with small numbers of relatively "pure" or unassimilated black, white, and Asian people. The name "Creole" was historically applied, as in the Seychelles and Mauritius, to French people native to the islands, as opposed to those who were expatriate "métropolitains"; the term "African" was reserved for those who were brought as labor (mostly slaves) from the continent. In contemporary usage, however, "Creole" has come to stand for a native islander of color, with "whites" seeking to distinguish themselves as "Europeans," and the term "African" has fallen into almost total disuse. As French language and education successfully penetrated all social groups, the populations of Réunion, the Seychelles, and Mauritius became culturally displaced in the metropolitan direction, abandoning conscious symbolic identification with Africa.

Nevertheless, the ethnic connection with Africa of most Seychellois and Réunionnais remains obvious in popular language and custom. The same is true for Mauritian Creoles, although in Mauritius a different ethnic arithmetic has evolved. In place of the relatively small groups of identifiable Asians found on the other islands, Mauritius has a two-thirds majority of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, and a substantial Chinese community. Only 30 percent of the

Mauritian population of 825,000 is creole, that is, a product of original French settlement and subsequent African and Malagasy slave immigration. The large Indian labor force dates from the mid-nineteenth century, and tended to develop in that exclusivist epoch into separate ethnic communities.

Thus the most distant of the islands also has the most tenuous ethnic ties to the continent, though this correlation has more to do with British political, labor, and immigration policies after the Napoleonic wars than with geography. Although the Seychelles, the BIOT islets, and Rodrigues (Mauritius' largest Mascarene dependency) also became British after 1810 -- as opposed to Réunion, Madagascar, and the Comoros, which became, or remained, French possessions in the nineteenth century -- only Mauritius enjoyed the sugar plantation development that required the replacement of African and mulatto slaves by mass Asian indentured labor in the 1830s. However, as the emancipated Creole population turned away from canefield labor to more urban occupations, they also gradually lost conscious identity with Africa, as did the Réunionnais and the Seychellois blacks.

Historical Connections

The historical relationship between Africa and the eastern-most islands -- uninhabited prior to European exploration -- has been determined completely by European consent. The islands' mulatto Creole populations descend largely from imported African and Malagasy plantation labor for Mauritius' and Réunion's coffee, spice, and sugar plantations, and for the Seychelles' coconut groves. The plantation crops were of course produced for European consumption, and available excesses of meat, fruit, vegetables, and timber served to provision metropolitan ships. Thus the trading system of the settler islands, like their labor and social patterns, has always been strictly bilateral. "Africa" in this context played a passive role: as an incubator of field hands and a locus of maritime refreshment and supply stations between the islands and the metropole.

So thorough has been the assimilation process that the importance of African blood in these societies is impossible to judge. Whatever their origins, however, the black ancestors of Mascarene and Seychellois Creoles were able to convey and retain impulses of Africa within flourishing hybrid cultures on all the eastern islands.

Politically and economically, of course, the fate of the African was bondage to European settlers until emancipation on Mauritius and the Seychelles in 1833, on Réunion in 1848. On these lovely oceanic mountaintops, found and claimed by Europeans, contact with Africa was meaningless. Slaves continued to come into the Mascarenes from Zanzibar, Mozambique, Kilwa, and Quelimane, but the vessels of transport were European and the commerce was one-way. Gradually, Madagascar replaced the continent as a source of foodstuffs, timber, and other necessities for the French islands, and with the opening of the Suez Canal and the advent of the steamship, the umbilical tie to Europe virtually bypassed Africa. So, although the Creole of the Seychelles, Réunion, and Mauritius might maintain a musical pulse, an intimacy with the dead, and a faith in the animated world that had

come there in chains with his black ancestor, his social orientation and cultural goal were henceforth joined to Europe.

In addition to the requirements of settler agriculture and shipping, the eastern islands served Europe as strategic bases in overseas imperial communications and chartered piracy (corsairs). They also acted as political safety valves for Britain and France: domestic factions of all classes were habitually deported to Indian Ocean sinecures (or servitude), and after the conquest of continental territory, African political leaders could be effectively isolated in these far reaches of the eastern sea. In 1899, the Asantehene Prempeh and other leading Ashanti were deported to the Seychelles, as David Kimble has written, "to make it clear that there was no hope of their return."[10] British colonial officials used similar tactics with other West African "troublemakers," and in Uganda with Kabarega and Mwanga. In 1953, Sultan Mohamed V of Morocco was sent by the French into regal exile in Madagascar, though he returned when popular appeals for his reinstatement became intolerable at home. The legendary leader of the Berber Rif rebellion, Ab-el Karim, was sent to Réunion by the French in 1926. Given the neutralizing purpose of political exile, it is understandable that these illustrious visitors to the Indian Ocean seldom significantly enhanced relations between their host islands and their remote countries of origin.

Once settled a millennium ago by the progenitors of their current Afro-Asian populations, the Comoros and Madagascar conducted a far more intimate relationship with Africa, and with each other.[11] Although the most populous parts of Madagascar -- the central plateau and the tropical east coast -- opened historically to the Arab and Asian east, most of the western side is inhabited by the Sakalava, Bara, Vizo, Antalaotes, and other Malagasy of mainly African descent. These people traded vigorously across the Mozambique Channel with Sofala and Quelimane, and from northwestern Madagascar dealt with Kilwa, the Comoros, Zanzibar, Mombasa, Malindi, and the entire Swahili coast until the destruction of the vast Indian Ocean trading system by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Chinese documents speak of what was probably Madagascar as early as the twelfth century; the subject was slaving, but there is good reason to assume the usual Indian Ocean breadth of trade in foodstufffs, minerals, and woods as well.[12]

Although the European advent meant the fabrication of an international maritime system for the eastern islands, it brought only destruction and decay to the ancient Afro-Asian economic network that involved Madagascar and the Comoros. Nothing ever quite restored what Portugal annihilated at Kilwa, Sofala, Lamu, and the other great city-states of the Swahili littoral. Europe severed the east-west Indian Ocean nexus, replacing it with an imperial link to the northwest only 400 years later. The intervening Omani-Arab hegemony (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries) embraced the Comoros only as a kind of strategic Islamic afterthought, and it neglected Madagascar, which was too far south for reliable monsoon sailing, too exposed to cyclones in the austral summer and to Portuguese depredations in the Mozambique Channel.

While most of western Madagascar stagnated, the northwest was

reorganized under the Sakalava kings of the seventeenth century who maintained close, if often piratical, connections with the Comoros. Virtually all of that archipelago had come under Persian (Shirazi) suzerainty and converted to Sha'afi Islam early in the sixteenth century; a series of emirates developed on each of the component islands, all more or less obeisant to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman. The Muslim Comorians and the animist coastal Malagasy engaged for centuries in a seesaw rivalry for slave-raiding and other spoils. Since both pirates and slavers were variously oriented to the Persian Gulf, the Eastern Indian Ocean, Europe, and Brazil, this Malagasy-Comorian connection had little to do with continental African affairs. The Sakalava kings lost much of their hinterland to the invading plateau Merina in the early nineteenth century, and successful French interpositions on the Comoros broke the contact with Zanzibar a few decades later. Concurrent British-German consolidation in the Sultan's East African dominions during the last quarter of the century reinforced the islands' alienation from Africa. The process was sealed by France's conquest of Madagascar in 1895-1896 and by French subjugation of the last Comorian emirate in 1908. Henceforth both territories, like Réunion, were to look to Paris for determination of their external relations and indeed for the regulation of their continuing complex ties with one another.

THE CONTEMPORARY INDIAN OCEAN

Madagascar

The Malagasy Republic and Mauritius, independent states for sixteen years and eight years respectively, have theoretically had time to give an indication of how autonomous Indian Ocean islands choose to relate to Africa. In the case of the Malagasy Republic, two distinct periods are discernible in this relationship: the first was the Tsiranana regime from 1960 to 1972; the second followed the rebellion of 1972.

The Tsiranana regime sustained close ties to France, mediated only by a loose casuistic concert of African leaders similarly inclined. The defunct Union of African and Malagasy States (UAM) and its successor, the African and Malagasy Common Services Organization (OCAM) represented the organized form of this essentially bilateral relationship, and Madagascar proved to be the archtype OCAM member. Philibert Tsiranana never lost faith in De Gaulle, maintaining an omnibus dependent relationship on Gaullist France as postcolonial "protecting power" even through the late 1960s, when the tribulations of Paris had begun to weaken French overseas pretensions and to affect the Malagasy perceptions of the efficacy of Tsiranana's strategy.[13]

However agreeable this insistence on bilateral privilege, De Gaulle's successors have been notoriously more pragmatic in executing French "protective" responsibilities. French relations with Mauritania, Benin (Dahomey), Upper Volta, Niger, Madagascar, and the Comoros -- as opposed to strategically more vital Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gabon, Djibouti, and Réunion -- have revealed a strategy of discrimination based on perceptions of essential French interests and a diplomacy of least resistance. When French strategy has come into conflict with the apparent interests of a secondarily important client state

or dependency, France has readily consented to a selective loosening of nonessential ties, retaining basic privileges (usually in favor of resident French nationals and businesses). The consequences of its relegation to secondary status profoundly affected the Malagasy Republic's internal politics in the 1970s.

Tsiranana's charge, as he seemed to understand it, was to steer a self-determined political course among partners congenial to overriding French strategic, economic, and cultural interests. This strategy permitted good relations with Taiwan and Israel even after France had lost direct fruitful contact there; it meant avoidance of "contamination" in the revolutionary socialist world, perilous to African and Indian Ocean stability even after De Gaulle's own flamboyant rapprochements with Moscow and Peking on the European level; it involved encouragement of South African trade and investment to the virtual exclusion of more militant OAU states; and it entailed strict limitations, not always well understood in Washington, on Anglo-American freedom of action in the Malagasy Republic. In every detail, the consequences of this harmonization of Franco-Malagasy policy handicapped the island's prospects for development of ties with independent black Africa.

Far from regarding Paris as a jealous, alienated, neocolonialist parent, Tsiranana's statecraft put the French into a role of head of family, providing security, prosperity, and effective example, demanding loyalty and consultation from the dependent offspring. Recalling the brutal and emotional suppression of Madagascar's premature nationalist revolt in 1947, and De Gaulle's recriminatory reaction to Guinea's vote against his proposed community in 1958, Tsiranana exerted skillful control over the manifestations of otherwise unguided nationalism among his reputedly moderate and respectful Malagasy.

France certainly applauded his disdain for East Africa's headstrong nationalists, especially in Zanzibar and Somalia, and for the continent's liberation-minded organizations -- all threatening the stability of overseas business and the lifelines of a vestigial empire. France had always encouraged a Malagasy sense of separateness from Africa, symbolized through such titles as "Union Africaine et Malgache," "Secrétariat d'État aux Affaires Africaines et Malgaches," and "Cooperation Technique en Afrique et à Madagascar," and through a separate currency. Further to French liking, Tsiranana's majority Social Democratic Party (PSD) was structurally congruent with the interests of the coastal peoples, the cotiers, and thus was fundamentally antagonistic to the historic nationalism of the plateau Merina. From the late eighteenth century, when the Merina monarchy began its expansion over the island, displacing the Sakalava in the west and other coastal suzerainties, the Malagasy nation became identified with Merina supremacy.

Merina Madagascar, isolated from both the Arab-Swahili trading system and the European "scramble" for East and Central Africa, was anything but an African nation. After its displacement by French imperialism in 1895-1896, Merina nationalism remained aloof from the continent, seeking various formulas of resurgence in European ideologies and Eurasian precedents. Tsiranana, a Tsimihety,

represented people accustomed to centuries of resistance against the Merina. He might have anchored Madagascar's republican fortunes in new soil, acknowledging the island's African roots, but he preferred the cultivated privileges of a "unique" Afro-Asian Madagascar dealing directly with France. He was overthrown in 1972 by a coalition of forces who were aware that Madagascaar could no longer afford such solitude.

Malagasy-African relations between 1958 (the Fifth Republic referendum year, in which Tsiranana "delivered" a 77 percent favorable vote to De Gaulle) and 1972 were cool and distant, dictated as much by the preeminent French nexus as were Britain's European ties by the Atlantic alliance. Pan-Africanism was scornfully rejected, and participation in OAU and related activity was purely formal. OCAM proved acceptable because (1) it reinforced France's paternal role in an enlarged francophone family, (2) it avoided African "radicalism," including nations ethnically closest to the Great Island's Africaneity (Tanzania and Frelimo Mozambique), and (3) it preserved Malagasy independence from Africa in the organization's title and governance.

At times Tsiranana claimed that Madagascar could not move too close to Africa lest it renounce its Asian component: "We have in fact both African and Asian blood. Madagascar represents a natural hyphenation between those two continents inhabited by brothers who must become our friends."[14] In practice, however, the Malagasy president kept his island even freer of Asian entanglements than it was of African connections.

A collateral network of relations was added to the Franco-Malagasy nexus beginning around 1967, when Tsiranana opened Madagascar to financial participation by South Africa. Madagascar behaved tolerantly of imperial Portugal across the Channel and evidently welcomed Pretoria's ideas concerning the maintenance of Western-dictated stability in the southern ocean. But the South African tourist industry and other substantial investments on the island were scrupulously justified as sound business practice, devoid of ideological implications. In this respect Tsiranana enjoyed comparing notes with Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, and regarded Madagascar as being in good company among other client states of the South Africans, including Lesotho.

In 1971-1972, a variety of forces combined to place inexorable pressures on the Tsiranana strategy. An enfeebled president's evident impotence in the mounting crises of domestic economic stagnation exposed the weakness of Malagasy dependence on France. Out of the morass emerged an unprecedented alliance of workers, peasants, students, soldiers, and urban unemployed in a year-long rebellion of the humiliated. City crowds brought the regime down in May, 1972, one year after a tragic peasants' rebellion in the desolate south -- and only five months after Tsiranana's third-term reelection, with the customary 99.72 percent of the votes.

A new course toward Africa seems to be one distinct result of the revolution of 1972. An interim military regime under General Gabriel Ramanantsoa, a Merina patrician, set forth on a mandate by

referendum to recast the republic in a new, thoroughly nationalist, image. Streets were renamed, educational institutions and major utility industries (including banks) were nationalized, and the primacy of the Malagasy language was reasserted over French. Malagasy technicians, teachers, and civil servants entered positions hitherto held by French "coopérants," with little apparent change in efficiency. Public administration departed in gradual steps (too gradual for some revolutionary alumni of 1972) from the overseas French model toward a revival of the traditional, albeit controversial, village council system or fokonolana.

Ramanantsoa's role at first recalled the early African experience of Generals Mobutu, Soglo, Lamizana, and Eyadema, all of whom succeeded regimes of hesitant, if any, nationalism. France had clearly indicated the secondary importance of Madagascar in May 1972, by refusing to rescue the beleagured Tsiranana. President Pompidou thus issued a signal that Malagasy nationalists had been awaiting for three-quarters of a century, however humiliating the lesson to Tsiranana'a Tories: France was prepared to see Madagascar reorient fundamental policy, as she had been prepared in comparable situations in Brazzaville, Mauritania, Upper Volta, and Niger. Madagascar not only was not unique; she no longer belonged with Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon, and Cameroun as citadels of overseas French prestige. Paris offered significant resistance only to Ramanantsoa's revision of the status of local French citizens and businesses and the demand for total withdrawal of France's military presence. Once-privileged Frenchmen were treated like any other resident aliens, subject to shocking (in their eyes) controls on repatriation of capital, immigration documentation, and taxes. Madagascar quit the Franc Zone, though the new currency retained its fifty-to-one pegged ratio to the French franc, and sought new trade and assistance openings far beyond the approved Franco-Malagasy pale.

This ebb tide away from France inevitably had implications for a reordering of relations with African states. By August 1973, Madagascar had withdrawn from OCAM (the "M" now stands for Mauritius) because it was more French than African, and had reversed economic accords with South Africa. Loans from China, on apparently more favorable terms, enabled the Malagasy to repay major debts to South Africa immediately. Relations have been maintained with the Soviet Union and with other socialist nations previously shunned by Tsiranana. Madagascar is declared for the first time to be "nonaligned," and has adhered to East African, Asian, and United Nations appeals for a demilitarized Indian Ocean "zone of peace."

By 1974, more positive relations were slowly developing with the African continent. Ramanantsoa's attendance at the Mogadishu OAU "summit" in June 1964, reversed Tsiranana'a personal indifference to the organization and his distaste for Somalia's putative pro-communist orientation, which of course threatened the French position in Djuibouti. The new government honored its commitments to the OAU liberation movements and turned its rhetoric against Portugal, at least until April 1974. Domestic reforms in land tenure, agriculture, and the fokonolona system were stimulated by study of Tanzanian approaches to rural development.

Domestic resistance to the 1972-1974 reform program gathered around the deposed president and several of his chief PDS lieutenants, now reorganized into the Malagasy Socialist Party (PSM). Almost by reflex, the old ruling elite sought their support, their objectives, and their norms of action in France. Riots, arson, and civil disobedience in 1973 and 1974 centered on the twin anxieties of alienation from the erstwhile protecting French and of revived deomination of the island by the Merina people under Ramanantsoa. The General's retirement in January 1975 failed to resolve these fears, which by then had eroded discipline in the military and had jeapordized the entire nationalist program at home. An attempted putsch by cotier military units claimed the life of Ramanantsoa's successor, Colonel Richard Ratsimandrava, in February, after only a single week in office. Another interim regime under General Gilles Andriamahazo restored order, albeit at the price of draconian restrictions on political activity.

In June 1975, Navy Captain Didier Ratsiraka, who as Ramanantsoa's foreign minister had been responsible for negotiating Madagascar's international position, was named president of a new regime dedicated to the fruition of the 1972-1974 programs. This mandate was confirmed in a national referendum on December 21,1975. The electorate at this time also endorsed a socialist program based on land reform, relative economic self-sufficiency, and revitalization of the traditional grass roots communal organization (fokonolona). The 1976 National Front government scrupulously represents a broad ethnic and political spectrum. Ratsiraka, a Betsimisaraka from the island's east coast, bluntly accepted Madagascar's destiny as an African society: "We regard ourselves as Africans," he told interviewers from the Paris weekly Jeune Afrique in 1974, " . . . even if there are several ways of being African. . . . The essential thing as I see it is to have an African Aim, to think African. In Madagascar a truly insular orientation exists, based on the presence of an Afro-Asian population. . . . The whole problem was isolation. The man in the street calls himself Malagasy and not African by virtue of an absence of relations."[15]

A reinvigorated African sensibility entails greater formal Malagasy consultation with African states on issues of common concern in international politics and development strategy. It promises a greater degree of cordiality along the East African coast, now especially interesting in the presence of an independent Mozambique. In the short run, however, Madagascar and her African neighbors seem to have litttle of "hard" value to offer one another: zonal air and shipping circuits as well as transport tariffs may eventually cease to be dictated entirely in European capitals, but intrazonal traffic can hardly be expected to expand without prior economic progress. This precondition involves a diversification of exports as well as an expansion of market demand. Madagascar's exports of coffee, vanilla, long-grain rice, sugar, pepper, cloves, sisal, raffia, and some minerals at best fail to interest her African neighbors, and often indeed compete with their own wares. Beef production, which might find markets in less-favored African countries, has been lagging for years, and the island suffers from severe shortages of foreign exchange to pay for manufactured goods from sterling countries such as Kenya. Cooperation with other Indian Ocean

states in fisheries and tourist development requires capital and expertise, as well as benevolence from industrialized nations. Until the capital and technology have been applied in judicious development strategy throughout the region, Madagascar's new African vocation can hardly be expected to create a replacement for comprehensive French economic partnership. In the early years, then, prospects for Afro-Malagasy solidarity may operate primarily on the symbolism of international voting patterns and concerted strategies toward the industrialized world.

Mauritius

While African-Malagasy relations appear subject to long-range development in a recalcitrant economic climate, Mauritius has succeeded in correcting her own isolation in a largely political context. The island's oceanic isolation and socioeconomic insecurity have caused a more positive, determined exploitation of all feasible openings toward the continent, indeed toward all continents. Hitherto virtually unknown to Africans except as a Commonwealth sugar supplier, Mauritius' Labour Government under Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam earned Africa's suspicions in 1965, three years before its independence, by consenting to the detachment of the Chagos archipelago from Mauritian administration for retention by Great Britain as part of the new British Indian Ocean Territory. Whitehall confirmed those suspicions by announcing that Diego Garcia atoll in the Chagos group would be developed jointly for Anglo-American strategic purposes. Although Mauritius obtained some £3 million for the transfer, and also cleared the path for independence without having to concede a UK-US base on her own property, Ramgoolam has been obliged repeatedly to confront new insinuations in African and third-world circles that still more chunks of the island's patrimony were being offered for somebody's military purposes. The list of putative beneficiaries includes the Soviet Union, China, Britain, India, France, and the United States.[16]

Ramgoolam's Labour Party had good reasons to restore relations with African nationalist politics of the OAU variety, though the party's ethnic base, 450,000 Hindu Indians (mostly an impoverished rural proletariat), has little to do with Africa. During the island's constitutional evolution from 1961 to 1968, Ramgoolam espoused majority-rule independence in an era when black African leaders had come to power, or were about to, on the same principles. Contact within the Commonwealth proved helpful in keeping pressures on Britain for general conformity to the "winds of change."

Ironically, Labour's main opposition, the largely Creole Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD), with an ethnic base much closer to Africa, presented a political image alien to the African ideals of the day. The 250,000 Creoles and certain other minority communities, fearing Hindu domination, bitterly campaigned for continued Mauritian dependence on Britain, or, alternatively, on France or the United States when Britain proved unreceptive. Unreconciled communal tensions provoked a series of sanguinary of pre-independence riots from 1963 to 1968. They forced an almost two-year postponement of the original timetable for independence and left observers predicting that Mauritius would be the world's unhappiest state.

Far from their original African inspirations, Creole Mauritians tend predominantly to Roman Catholicism, urban trades, and the mystique of French language and culture. Their standards are thus set by the descendants of their erstwhile slave masters, a patrician community of 10,000 white Franco-Mauritians for whom Paris still stands as the world's only cosmopolis. A third major ethnic group, 135,000 Muslims from the Indian subcontinent, is divided politically into one party that supports Labour and another faction that supports the PMSD.

Soon after independence the Creole PMSD leader, Gaetan Duval, came increasingly to perceive the advantages of sharing power in grand coalition with Ramgoolam, rather than of pursuing the old obstructionist tactics in an incendiary setting. By December 1969, Duval was Ramgoolam's foreign minister, and the world began to be entertained by one of the most multidirectional of recent foreign policies.

Basically, Ramgoolam espoused a nationalistic, "third world" style for Mauritius. The Prime Minister's strongest affinities were for India and Britain, but he also established productive relations with France, Germany, Pakistan, the Soviet Union, and China. Non-alignment was the dominant theme, with memberships in the OAU, the UN Africa bloc, and UN agencies augmented by both Commonwealth and OCAM adherence. The flamboyant Duval, on the other hand, who blended urban populism and class interests in his domestic politics, cared little for the themes of African unity and anticolonialism, criticized Ramgoolam's trade and technical accords with China and the Soviet Union, courted France and conservative Francophone states assiduously, and promoted trade and tourism with South Africa. In the fall of 1970, Duval was wooing Durban tea importers and Ramgoolam was attacking apartheid in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in New York. While the Prime Minister was adhering to the Afro-Asian appeal for demilitarization of the Indian Ocean, Duval publicly "offered" Britain a naval base on Mauritius if South Africa ejected her from Simonstown. In 1972, Ramgoolam announced recognition of Peking during a visit to Taipei of two ministers from Duval's PMSD; and Duval was at the time in New York cosponsoring the American "two Chinas" resolutions. In 1973, while some press sources were reiterating reports of a Russian deal with Ramgoolam to obtain the unused old port of Mahébourg as a "trawler base," Duval was alleged to be interesting France in the same site as a replacement for French naval installations evacuated at Diégo Suarez on Madagascar.

On two occasions, these policy contradictions broke down the coalition. Duval was fired in December 1973 (primarily for insubordination over internal tax policy), and now enjoys the role of Leader of the Opposition. But the imaginative balancing act has continued, showing that multifarious foreign relations are part of the national design, not mere functions of Ramgoolam-Duval competition. Even in Duval's absence, Mauritian-Israeli relations persevere, in defiance of the 1973-1974 OAU bandwagon of ruptured relations. The South African trade connection has also remained, and South African tourism increased as Mozambique and the Malagasy Republic turned against Vorster's republic. Ramgoolam continues to be cordial with France, cooperative in the rump OCAM bloc, and hopeful of cooperation

with nearby Réunion, which is dominated by a conservative plutocracy.

If apparent policy inconsistencies have compromised his otherwise credible third-world orientation, Ramgoolam betrays no sign of change: his pressure-packed little island is as able to straddle continents as ideologies. The OAU met there in June 1976 and Ramgoolam became the first OAU chairman who happens to rank only as Chief of Government, not Chief of State (Queen Elizabeth still holds that honor). But he pays a price at home, where rapprochement with the conservative PMSD, together with an authoritarian governmental style, provoked the creation of a dynamic opposition on the left -- the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM), composed primarily of disillusioned (often unemployed) youth and impatient labor unions. The MMM leaders, while weathering thunderbolts from the establishment, have built up a political force that poses a serious challenge to Ramgoolam and his Labour Party hegemony once the oft-postponed elections are finally held. Ramgoolam's credentials remain intact throughout the Commonwealth, the OACU, UNCTAD, and the socialist world, as well as in the Francophone Association, OCAM, and the EEC-associated states. Although the African interlocutors are scarcely able to respond to Mauritius' urgent and chronic need for sugar markets, infrastructural development, labor-intensive manufacturing investment, and cheap consumer imports, Ramgoolam jealously conserves their political sympathies. These he has been able to convert into needed support within larger forums, to permit this overcrowded, monocrop island in the disastrous cyclone belt to obtain what it needs for survival.

The Seychelles

It seems reasonable to expect that the orientation of the two new Indian Ocean island nations toward Africa will reflect the experience both have had with the continent prior to independence. And there are some close parallels: in both the Seychelles and the Comoros a reluctant political leadership finally gave in to independence after having eschewed the concept for years as suicidal. Both leaderships had argued that their islands were too poor and tiny for independence to be viable. However, both faced opposition movements nurtured by OAU support and sheltered among expatriate laborers in that "capital of liberation movements," Dar es Salaam.

In the case of the Seychelles, the surprise announcement by President (then Chief Minister) James Mancham, in March 1974, that the islands would seek independence, was directly connected to the success that the opposition Seychelles Peoples United Party (SPUP) had achieved in obtaining recognition from the OAU.[17] Key SPUP leaders, notably Guy Sinon and Matthew Servina, had previously developed close contacts with labor leaders in East Africa. Increasingly, as the 1970s got under way, the SPUP's rhetoric stressed socialist principles and independence from England, and the party was acknowledged as the recognized independence movement by the OAU Liberation Committee, with "observer" status in the OAU.

The connection of the SPUP with Black Africa is not easy to make on the basis of racial differences between the Seychellois

political parties. The SPUP's top leader since its origin in 1963-1964 has been France-Albert René, a white lawyer. Other whites, the physician Maxime Ferrari and the planter Karl St. Ange, give SPUP leadership a strongly multiracial character. The same can be said for the governing Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP). Mancham has Oriental blood; his party represents people of African, Asian, and European extraction. The orientation of the two parties toward Africa has had much more to do with the politics and ideology of independence and with power over domestic affairs than with race. The SDP had defended its continued faith in British rule with warnings that the British mantle was economically essential. As long as the SDP kept winning elections (1967, 1970) under the constitutions that led to internal self-government, continued subordination to England was politically expedient as well as, some people would argue, sensible. Britain responded with modest aid allocations, keeping the Seychelles budget balanced despite fluctuations in export volume and terms of trade, and completing the archipelago's first airport, on Mahé, in 1971. The sudden accessibility of the Seychelles has facilitated a surge in tourism, mainly from Britain, Northern Europe, and South Africa.

Events since 1970 have connected the Seychelles with Africa in a way that will probably influence the outlook of the new island country, at least for the short-run period after independence. Seeking support for its autonomy cum independence program, the SPUP in 1971 obtained recognition from the OAU as a legitimate liberation movement. The more conservative SDP countered by interpreting its election victories as popular repudiation of any "liberation" movement according to strict principles of self-determination. The SPUP retorted that the genuine majority was being frustrated by electoral fraud. It pointed to considerable support among the thousands of Seychellois laborers who hold jobs in East Africa, thus invoking African influence in this historically imperialized cluster of islands.

Official observer status was not the only plum that the SPUP harvested from the OAU, though financial support from the Liberation Committee amounted to only $28,000 by 1973. The SDP found this African intervention on the side of their opposition to be acutely embarrassing. The SPUP spent a large part of their money to defend a party zealot on trial for setting a bomb in a new hotel -- part of an apparent 1971-1972 campaign to sabotage the government's "tourism boom." They squeezed every ounce of possible propaganda value from the trial in an attempt to prove the SDP's "oppressive tactics."

Probably the strongest of the SPUP arguments for OAU recognition was the governing SDP's earlier complicity in Anglo-American strategic plans for the Western Indian Ocean. The United States Air Force has operated a satellite tracking station on Mahé for more than a decade. In 1965, Aldabra, Farquhar, and Des Roches islands were detached from the Seychelles and were joined to similarly alienated Mauritian property (including Diego Garcia in the Chagos) to form the vast, sparse, strategic British Indian Ocean Territory reserve. Although Britain's ardor for defending the zone through the BIOT had cooled by 1970, the United States has proceeded with development of facilities on Diego Garcia and has surveyed other

BIOT components nearer to the Seychelles. As Indian Ocean demilitarization grew in popularity among African and Asian nations, the BIOT "betrayal" became available to taint the SDP's image and to provide the SPUP with an opening toward the favor of African leaders.

While it lasted, the independence issue touched raw nerves. It was associated inevitably with Africa and with that continent's race-conscious politics. African members of the UN's decolonization committee regularly berated Britain for blocking Seychellois self-determination despite the prima facie evidence of the SDP election victories. The SPUP thus had earlier access to key continental personalities, especially in the Tanzanian government and overseas radio service, where the SDP was branded as a traitorous collaborator of the imperialists. Eventually, the SDP was forced to enter the contest directly, realizing the difficulty of defending, and indeed of ensuring, prolonged British rule in the face of international opprobrium.

The turning point in SDP thinking may have been Chief Minister Mancham's tour of several leading OAU countries in February 1974. Once again, Mancham advocated the untimely concept of beneficial colonial rule. He argued that the OAU should be faithful to its own advocacy of self-determination; if a people chose continued colonial subordination, they should be left alone to enjoy it. But he began to understand the disadvantages of that position as the British Labour Government carried out the last resolute stages of its systematic "evacuation East of Suez" policy.

By March 1974, Mancham had decided that the SDP could no longer hold its domestic political lead without co-opting the independence issue. His shift of policy on independence made his party more palatable to the OAU, and his June 1974 mission to OAU meeting in Mogadishu was successful; the SDP was recognized as the majority party and was applauded for its independence quest. Mancham had accomplished a major objective: it would be difficult for the OAU to continue giving funds to the SPUP opposition once the majority SDP had been admitted as an observer to the OAU summit conference. After combining SPUP liberation and SDP loyalism, Mancham and René were able to agree on a series of constitutional compromises during 1975-1976, clearing the way toward independence for the Seychelles as a republic (a point for the SPUP) but without holding new elections (a point for the SDP). When the day of sovereignty came , on June 28, 1976, Mancham assumed the presidency, with René as prime minister of a coalition government. The BIOT issue was resolved by London's agreement (with Washington's consent) to return Aldabra, Des Roches, and Farquhar to the new republic. Mancham also proclaimed his nation's neutrality in Great Power rivalries. He continued to deal with Britain and the West, though disclaiming any prospect of defense agreemnts, while René went his way with Russia and China.

These concessions assured the Seychelles of automatic admission to the OAU. SPUP participation in Mancham's regime provides the medium for congeniality with Africa's more radical states who would have been loath to accept an all-SDP government. In fact, during the last several years, contending partisan appreciations of Africa took an important and bitter place in the constant argument

over independence. Mancham's SDP painted the continent as ruthless, actively racist, antidemocratic, and, with a few exceptions such as Kenya, unconstructively "Socialist-oriented."[18] The SDP warned that those African states who had pushed the OAU to accept the SPUP as a "genuine liberation movement" must have had aims of their own: either they wished to embarrass their former colonial masters, or they were using Seychelles domestic politics for leverage against the Indian Ocean strategic designs of the United States and Britain. In any case, the SDP argued that the OAU was misled by René, Sinon, and Servina into believing that the SPUP represented a majority of Seychellois.

Even after the OAU decided to acknowledge the SDP government, the SPUP has raised the issue of the Seychelles' South African relationship to discredit Mancham's image. By the mid-1970s, South African tourists were increasingly among those lured to the islands, and in September 1974, South African Airways began service to the Seychelles. The SPUP delighted in pointing out that this service began soon after Mancham had declared at Mogadishu that the Seychelles would observe the OAU policy of embargo against South Africa. However, the SPUP was likely to encounter ever-increasing difficulty in using this issue to embarrass the SDP, for Southern African events moved so fast after 1974 as to blur the contrast between the "confrontation" policy espoused by the more radical Black African governments, and the "dialogue" approach advocated by Malawi and Ivory Coast. In any case, Mancham's acceptance of trade and tourism with South Africa merely classed the SDP among the more accommodationist Southern African governments. Sounding very much like Malawi's Banda, Mancham argued, under the UN Decolonization Committee's questioning: "We have no sympathy for and cannot but condemn in the strongest possible terms the policy of apartheid as practiced in South Africa or anything else which resembles it in any part of the world."[19] But the proper tactics toward South Africa, as seen by Mancham's party newspaper, should include contact and example: "What is wrong, therefore, in allowing South Africans who are prepared to pay for sunshine to discover in the process the falsity of their Government's doctrine?"[20]

Independent Seychelles must face the implications of its large Creole labor communities in East Africa, many of whom may seek, or may be forced into, repatriation. Tourism and related industries may resume their upward climb once international economic conditions become more favorable, but the job-creation achievements in this sector have been disappointing thus far. The islands' copra and spices fail to attract purchasers in Africa, and the fish catch barely satisfies local demand. Trade and capital growth depend on links to the Commonwealth, the UN agencies, the enlarged EEC, certain bilateral partners, and other factors. Prospects for substantive growth in relations with African nations thus lie mainly in political and cultural areas, depending on the inability of the present Mancham-René coalition. They count on the possibility of increased imports of manufactured goods and foodstuffs from relatively strong continental producers such as Kenya and on a common desire to establish a pattern of cooperation among Africans (as opposed to that between Africans and Europeans) in transportation and tourism.

The Comoro Islands

Recent Comorian political relations with Africa have approximated the Seychelles experience, including the existence of a significant Comorian diaspora in the East African coastal towns and on Madagascar, Zanzibar, and Pemba.[21] Doubtless more Comorian men live in these places than in the four home islands.

Categorically warned by General DeGaulle in 1958 that a referendum vote to leave French territorial status would have a traumatic effect on the feeble Comorian economy, the archipelago voted handsomely to stay put. Only cosmetic constitutional adjustments responded in the Comoros to the East African political awakening that led to independence for seven nearby states between 1961 and 1964. One noted scholar of French politics observed that the sleepy Comoros were "unlikely to seek independence in any immediately foreseeable future."[22] This attitude was confirmed in the conservative, pro-French accomodationist domination of island politics until 1972. The establishment was exemplified by Dr. Said Mohamed Cheik, President of the Governing Council until his death in 1972. Both are deceased, but their legacies are carried on by leaders of Cheik's Comoros Democratic Union (UDC) and Ibrahim's Democratic Assembly of the Comorian People (RDPC); both parties participate in the United National Front, which emerged on top of the political wrangling in 1975. To succeed, the Front had to depose Ahmed Abdallah, a wealthy, self-indulgent partner in French import-export affairs, who owed his position to a compromise between the Old Guard and the new, more nationalistic forces that had emerged to legislative dominance in mid-1972 and had petitioned President Pompidou for a change of status. A fourth more or less "traditional" party called UMMA (The People) was begun in 1971 by Said Ibrahim himself but soon came under the control of Ali Soilih, a young agronomist of Garibaldian temper who engineered the overthrow of Abdallah in August 1975, and, after an interim triumvirate led by the RDPC's Said Mohamed Jaffar, had himself designated Chief of State in January 1976. Party coherence in the Comoros results from casuistical alliances among personalities and intra-island constituencies.

During his 1972-1975 preeminence, Ahmed Abdallah saw independence as a regrettable necessity for reasons similar to, if not quite identical with, those that were later to influence James Mancham's decision in the Seychelles. As a Comorian Senator in Paris, Abdallah appreciated both the inevitable growth of nationalist sentiment among an excrutiatingly poor and exploited population (particularly among an embittered generation of students and school-leavers) and the growing disinterest of the French in retaining an Indian Ocean colonial burden for the sake of Gaullian prestige. Already the islands had been cut to about one-fifth of the total annual French assistance to the Overseas Territories, of which they represented half the population, and even those funds were wastefully expended. Finessing the more radical nationalism of the 1972 movement, Abdallah was determined to negotiate independence congenially with France, and if possible to protect the interests of the half-dozen metropolitan plantation-commercial companies that controlled the islands' economies. In a speech to the French Senate in 1970, Abdallah had already declared that French stinginess was making continued Comorian allegiance to

France "extremely difficult."

In this respect, the Comorian and Seychelles experiences reflect contrasts between the complex of expectations aroused by a highly paternalistic French colonial approach and the more austere British models: although London is no more generous to the Seychelles than Paris is to the Comoros, the British avoided such sentiments of alienation. The ungenerous metropole represents one of three factors that caused the conservative UDC-RDPC leaders to conclude in favor of the lamentable necessity of leaving French rule in 1972. A second cause was the pressuring of the resident elite from outside the islands by impatient anticolonial political elements. Here, Comorian experience closely parallels that of the Seychelles, except for the shock of the nationalist revolution of May 1972, in the Malagasy Republic, where 50,000 Comorians lived and where Tsiranana had always seemed to provide a model for congenial evolutionary relations with France. The 1972 Malagasy experience showed dramatically that France would not fight to retain her hold, even on such strategic property as the naval base at Diego Suarez; it also indicated that the Malagasy could no longer be expected to tolerate autonomous and often volatile Comorian laboring communities in Madagascar's cities. The UDC and the RDPC understood that under these new circumstances, if the respectable Comorian leadership failed to seize the initiative, the islands might be overcome by mob action supported from "abroad," while Paris washed its hands.

The established Comorian independence movement was MOLINACO (National Liberation Movement of the Comoros), formed in 1962 by Comorian intellectuals living in Dar es Salaam. MOLINACO's location proved to be fortuitous, for by 1965 Tanzania was taking a leading role in the development of a "radical" stance toward liberation of the remaining colonial territories, and the permanent office of the OAU's Liberation Committee was to be in Dar es Salaam. Both the OAU and the Tanzanian government have been useful in steadying MOLINACO -- for example, during an internal crisis within the party in 1970-1971, when a radical youth wing tried to turn it toward forceful tactics that could oust the French from the Comoros. The Secretary-General, Abdou Bakari Boina, weathered this storm and embarked on his own new approach in 1973.

Until 1967, MOLINACO did little inside the Comoros, perhaps because of the effectiveness of French control. It remained purely an emigré party, and efforts were concentrated on organizing branches in the Malagasy Republic and in Réunion and on recruiting financial aid, mostly from the OAU and the Soviet Union. After 1967 it became much more active, through agents in the islands and through two parties formed locally to represent its views. March 1968 saw the first of many demonstrations at the secondary school in Moroni, the Comorian capital, that were generally credited to MOLINACO. In addition, MOLINACO successfully lobbied at the United Nations to have the Comoros included on the list of territories under "colonial domination."

In August 1969 a group of young people, mostly students, formed the Socialist Party of the Comoros (PASOCO) to spread the message of independence and socioeconomic reform in the islands. This party was harrassed by the authorities, French and Comorian, who

thought of it primarily as communist-inspired and tactically violent.

Until June 1971, MOLINACO officially considered the PASOCO its arm in the islands. Several trends then coincided to persuade MOLINACO of a change of tactics. First of all, the PASOCO had failed to gain rapid popularity. Second, Boina had by this time overcome more radical opposition within his emigré party. Third, the shape of the post-Cheikh Comorian Government proved to be more pragmatic and less conservative as its members dared to voice more openly their dissatisfaction with French rule.

As a result, in 1972 the Party for the Evolution of the Comoros (PEC) was formed with a view toward cooperation with the traditional parties and encouragement of a growing feeling among the controlling elite that the Comoros could do better economically as an independent country. Unlike the PASOCO, the PEC was flexible enough to join a new political front of center parties, the Union for the Evolution of the Comoros (UEC), produced by increasing cooperation between the RDPC and the UDC in the early 1970s. Although leaders of both the traditional parties that formed the bulk of the Union insisted that it was in fact a replacement for the older individual parties, and that their central committees had been merged, the Union is more correctly labeled an electoral alliance. This was particularly true when the PEC and other more reformist elements joined the Union. The most that could be said for the prospects for continued unity was that the Union's diverse participants, whatever their reasons, shared a desire for greater independence from France. But it is important not to lose sight of the fact that most participants in the UEC had only recently joined the independence issue, that their differences were of much longer standing than their common beliefs, and that these differences would be likely not only to emerge afresh after independence, but perhaps even to be exacerbated by the contest over the spoils of power. Although even MOLINACO leaders were working cordially with the "mainstream" politicians during 1973, their perspectives on the UDC and the RDPC cannot have changed greatly. Perhaps with tongue in cheek, MOLINACO's view of the UDC was that "it used to be regarded by nationalists as a puppet party."[23] By 1974 the level of cooperation between MOLINACO and the governing coalition had begun to drop. From a high point of cooperative politics in January 1973, when the parties signed a memorandum of agreement on independence at an OAU meeting in Accra, relations had soured by August when MOLINACO representatives condemned the coalition's conservatism.

Haggling in Paris over terms and schedules for independence consumed all of 1973 and 1974, while Comorian nationalists fumed at perfidious France. Abdallah kept to his authorized course of "independence by 1976 in friendship with France," and trusted to the good sense of the French to promote an orderly transfer of powers to the moderate UEC coalition, rather than to suffer a violent shock from radical forces supported by African and Arab troublemakers. French reluctance to cut the Comoros loose, despite De Gaulle's threats in 1958, emerged from both economic and military motives, mixed with sentimentality. The French high command, once aware by early 1973 of the new Malagasy government's intention to evict them from Diégo Suarez and other military sites on the Great Island, began to evaluate a secure Comorian foothold more appreciatively. This

assessment was emphasized by awareness of the chronic instability of the Afars and Issas Territory (Djibouti) as Ethiopia's ancient and complaisant monarchy crumbled; it was further reinforced by increasing east-west power plays in the Indian Ocean, and by continued Chinese use of Dar es Salaam in connection with the construction of the Tan-Zam Railway. The impending retreat of Portugal from Mozambique, the opening of the Suez Canal to Russian shipping, the loss of South African influence in Madagascar, the expansion of United States and British use of Diego Garcia, and reports of Russian missile installations in Somalia and Aden all persuaded the French of a need for a strengthened presence in the Western Indian Ocean, a presence for which Réunion's modest facilities would scarcely suffice.

Moreover, as international economic problems preoccupied the new government of President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, the small protected Comorian market for French exports (85 percent of the Territory's purchases) became more valuable than it had been. The oligarchy of French concessionary companies in the islands made their case for import-export protectionism an argument that ususally finds sympathy among the Gaullist plurality in Paris.

An additional and perhaps crucial factor mobilized French sentiment against Comorian independence in 1974: the political notables of the southernmost island of Mayotte, which has 10 percent of the archipelago's population, rose stridently to demand their "right" to remain in territorial dependence on France. The Mayotte separatist party, the Mouvement Populaire Mahorais (MPM), represented the sole important exception to the UEC front in the plebescitary elections of 1972, acquiring five out of thirty-nine deputies elected to the Chamber. The MPM appeals for an "island by island" referendum on independence won a remarkable hearing among the Gaullist UDR in 1974, partly because ex-Premier Pierre Messmer had pledged such a process to Mayotte in January 1972, when he served as Minister for Overseas Territories. The real cause of the MPM's resonance in French legislative circles comes from the peculiar acoustics of post-imperial France -- an equation of security, economy, and culture. Mayotte possesses the archipelago's only secure all-year deep-water port, at Dzaoudzi; the Mahorais (as Mayotte residents used to be known and still like to call themselves) are disposed to offer those facilities to France, just as they have welcomed battalions of Foreign Legionnaires on their island for decades; Mayotte is relatively fertile, well endowed for fisheries and for tourist development, and is under-populated -- a stark exception in the teeming Comoros; and finally, the Mahorais proclaim their basic cultural affinities to France -- as the first occupied of the archipelago, the nearest French military base to Madagascar, the most highly Roman Catholicized, and the most "European" of all the islands' bloodstreams. Dzaoudzi had in fact been the capital of the territory until 1961, and thus enjoyed the presence and the favors of metropolitan administration and security personnel.

When the MPM managed to obtain a 63 percent vote against independence in the 1974 referendum of December 21 -- as opposed to an almost unanimous pro-independence turnout on the three other islands -- the French parliament resounded with panegyrics in support of the loyal little Gallic rock. The referendum, designed to be unitary, was

in fact being interpreted as an island-by-island plebescite. French business minds reflected on prospects for developing Mayotte in isolation from general Comorian poverty, and French strategists mapped air and sea installations on the tiny, reef-fringed island. Abdallah, though risking criticism from African governments, assured France of his willingness to discuss the military-base idea without separating Dzaoudzi from the rest of independent Comoros. But France looked over Abdallah's shoulder at an increasingly "radical" electorate on the volatile Grand Comoro and Anjouan islands, a mass that would reach out instinctively toward revolutionary Zanzibar, Tanzania, and now even Madagascar and Mozambique. Giscard's ministers argued that retaining Mayotte for France against the will of the archipelago's majority would injure Comorian territorial integrity and would jeopardize prospects for Franco-Comorian cooperation in the future. Abdallah reiterated assurances of a loose constitutional structure under independence, which would guarantee maximum administrative autonomy to each island.

But the appeal of the Mahorais is for consideration for the loyalist implications of their claimed "Creole" status -- a mixture of French, African, Malagasy, and Arab blood and a dominant religious and cultural orientation toward Europe -- comparable to that of Réunion or the Seychelles. The argument is specious in view of the island's profoundly Malagasy and African ethnic character and of the Islamic-animist foundation of Mahorais culture, established well before the few Frenchmen visited the island to father a small but politically conspicuous mulatto elite. Nevertheless, that elite has preached the island's case to be European, and on June 26, 1975, was rewarded by the French National Assembly. Abandoning the government's case for majority rule of an intact territory, the UDR faction carried the Assembly in repudiating its 1974 determination, postponing independence for an additional six months pending another referendum -- this one to be conducted on an island-by-island basis, which would separate loyal Mayotte from the emerging Comorian nation. At this point, Comorian patience snapped: on July 6, the Abdallah regime declared the territory (including Mayotte) to be independent from perfidious France. Four weeks later Abdallah was deposed by Soilih's National Front on the argument that his intransigeance prevented reconcilialtion with the Mahorais and the French. Abdallah held out on his home island of Anjouan until September 21, but the new junta prevailed under Soilih, who officially became president on January 2, 1976.

Soilih's claim of improved compatibility with France was unavailing, since Mayotte stayed under French control despite a pretense of negotiations in Paris during October 1975. On the secessionist island, MPM forces expelled some 2000 non-Mahorais Comorians, preparing for the second referendum, which the Soilih government refused to countenance. Acknowledging the stalemate, France recognized the Comorian "UDI" in December as applicable to the three islands under local control, and staged the Mayotte referendum on February 8, 1976, scoring a 99.4 percent victory for continued dependence of the island on its metropole. A third referendum, conducted on April 11, indicated Mahorais preference for Overseas Department status, comparable to that of Réunion, rather than perpetuation of the Territorial (colonial) situation

under which the archipelago had suffered from 1958 to 1975.

The Moroni regime protested each step undertaken by Paris, calling on African and third world brethren to witness this dereliction of self-determination. After nationalizing official French property on the three islands in December, the Comoros felt the ancient 1958 curse of General De Gaulle as all French civil servants, technicians, teachers, and medical personnel were summarily removed from the now "foreign" territory, pending a formal bilateral agreement that would restore metropolitan aid ("cooperation") -- in exchange, of course, for consent to the loss of Mayotte. France also had to face slightly inaccurate charges at the OAU meeting in Kampala in July 1975, to the effect that troops had been rushed to "invade" the mutinous archipelago after "UDI". (Legionnaires had been stationed on Mayotte all the time, but they were reinforced during July by gendarmes from Réunion.) Paris had to use a precious veto in the UN Security Council on the eve of the referendum of February 8, 1976, to avoid condemnation as a "threat to the peace."

Although powerless to wrest Mayotte from France, the Comorians were able at least to reassert their proximity to Africa during the 1975-1976 crisis, penetrating the barrier that Europe had imposed between the islands and the continent when the old nineteenth-century Zanzibari network was ruptured. The OAU admitted the new republic forthwith, notwithstanding the unilateral nature of its independent status from July until December 10, 1975, when the three-island Comoros were recognized de jure by the French National Assembly. East African initiatives paved the way for Comorian entry into the United Nations on November 12, 1975, without opposition from France, whose perch on Mayotte remained unbudged.

In the recent past, the French role, like that of Britain in the Seychelles, has been ambiguous. They permitted a large and vocal diaspora to build up on the mainland and on the nearby islands, yet continued to deal only with a land-owning elite. When those notables discovered the political perils of prolonging this state of affairs, France thought to extricate itself through applicaltion of the old Gaullist "orderly transfer of powers" procedure, reserving vital privileges for its military and its businessmen. Yet Paris has been sympathetic to Mahori separatism, even after crushing Mayotte psychologically and economically when the territorial capital was moved from Dzaoudzi to Moroni in 1961. France neglected educational and economic demands on the islands as though certain of their immutable loyalty, but now must find a new way to make a French military presence palatable to an aroused and embittered island society. The "dispensable" African Comoros of 1958 have turned out to be more "valuable," or certainly of greater concern, to France than anyone had predicted.

Although it is not entirely true that pressure from Africa alone induced Comorian politicians to seek independence, the result promises to bring the islands into the African orbit. The Comorian change of heart has been gradual, genuinely nationalistic, acknowledging shifts in an increasingly youthful, self-consciously deprived electorate, responding to the challenge raised by Mahori

dissidence, aware of the need to produce at least a semblance of development, and aroused by the revolution of 1972 in the Malagasy Republic. In Comorian eyes, France has proved negligent on all counts. Comorian leaders, caught between Africa-based MOLINACO and PASOCO pressures on the left and the retrograde toryism of the Mahori "Creoles" on the right, were forced to act with unaccustomed rapidity in 1975 and 1976. Without abandoning the Mayotte irredenta, they dedicated themselves to consolidation and stability for a nation born into poverty so dire that there was very little left to collapse when France pulled the props out from under the territorial economy.

The new Comorian regime now has an opportunity to emerge from Giscard's dilemma with unqualified sovereignty, thus earning a hero's welcome in the OAU and related forums. Whether or not their "UDI" can be defended, a new Comorian nation may be able to deal autonomously with Europeans over EEC association, with an enlarged international competition over development assistance, with Arab states that have already manifested interest in this southernmost outpost of Islam, and with East African and Malagasy neighbors who would otherwise have expressed suspicion over too close a postcolonial relationship to the ex-metropole. Considering what they have obtained from that metropole to date, the Comorians have little to lose.

Réunion

As a Department of France, settled from the outset by Europeans and experiencing minimal contact with the African continent, Creole Réunion seems incontrovertibly an overseas projection of Europe.[24] Paris's political hold is complete here, to about the extent of Washington's over Hawaii. The original settlement of French derelicts, prostitutes, adventurers, and younger patrician sons has continued through the centuries in a trickle of planters, politicians, civil servants, and innkeepers. The more recent waves included ex-Gaullist Premier Michel Debré, elected parliamentary deputy in a 1963 by-election from Réunion after losing his seat on the Loire. As Foreign Minister and later as Defense Minister, Debré has ensured that French zonal strategy concentrated increasingly in loyal Réunion, especially after the "defection" of the Malagasy Republic from the strategic system in 1972-1973. This strategic privilege has been enhanced in 1976 by the imminence of independence for France's garrisoned Affars and Issas territory, by the apparent radicalization of Mozambique, by the continued controversy over French retention of Mayotte in the Comoros, and by the general inflammation of the Southern African liberation arena. Under a welter of special legislation, Réunion, like the Caribbean Overseas Departments, remains a total ward of highly-centralized French budgetary, taxation, and welfare programs. France takes Réunion's monocrop of sugar at astronomical prices and grants other regular aid concessions to justify her monopoly over the island's political, economic, and cultural transactions.

The principal movement against metropolitan control owes little to African ideologies or organization. Autonomy for Réunion is the essential aim of the Communist Party (PCR), whose inspirations come from European sources. Although it is by no means the sole

nationalist faction on the island, the PCR furnishes the spearhead for Reunionnais particularism and takes most of the punishment when the French establishment reacts. As in France, the party seeks the overthrow of class tyranny as a priority, and it pursues its goals through an orthodox electoral and cadre-organizational approach that earns reprisals in the form of preventive detentions, rigged elections, and other harrassments.

Even the anticolonial opposition on the island represents an exception to African nationalism as it has developed since the 1950s. The Bantu heritage of Réunion's majority has been lost in Creole consciousness, though it appears in the cadences of popular culture. Some of the preoccupations of Africa's leaders resound among the concerns of the island's autonomists -- the intensification of great power rivalries in the Indian Ocean, for example, felt most directly on Réunion as French garrisons accumulate along the island's west coast and on several tiny islets under its administrative jurisdiction (Europa, Jean de Nova). Despite the obedience of the PCR to the metropolitan Communist Party, its chairman, Paul Vergès, has campaigned for third-world "zone of peace" movements aimed at evicting alien navies, including the Soviet navy, from the Indian Ocean. Through long periods of persecution, the PCR has developed a mastery of ambiguity in its policy pronouncements. Its autonomist platform emphasizes decentralization rather than independence, as though to reassure Paris (and local opinion) that unlike the unreliable machinations of Malagasy and Comorian nationalism, Réunion's particularists sought only to correct the handicaps imposed by the island's distance from France.

It is understandable, therefore, that despite the aura of African religion in Creole culture, Réunion's principal point of contact with the continent should be South Africa. In deciding to open the beautiful but overcrowded island to regional tourist development, the French thought first of the South African market, especially as Madagascar and Mozambique became less hospitable. The first breach in Air France's monopoly on Réunion traffic was a concession to South African Airways. An influx of Pretorian capital and vacationers in an ambience of graceful if impoverished Old Gallic charm has helped the opposition link up with contemporary African politics. Thanks to the South African connection, French intellectuals, professional people, Creole journalists, and liberal Roman Catholic clergy now have an "audience" in Africa and Madagascar for their criticism of the one-way colonial economics and the hard-nosed injustices of an unreformed society. The liberalism of Mauritius' external affairs policies and the triumph of nationalism in the Malagasy Republic have furnished examples and interlocutors to these otherwise lonely island autonomists. But unlike the CPR, the Center and Center-Left movements (the Réformateur and Socialist PSR parties) have failed to develop a serious electoral punch, even under "popular front" blandishments from Vergès and from the metropolitan (Mitterand) left. Possibly the CPR is right: before Réunion can recognize affinities to a non-European world, it must first begin to weaken the island's systematic dependence on an imperial matrix.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, divided by gulfs of colonial policy and national practice, the Western Indian Ocean islands display no common pattern in their relations to Africa. Standing at different stages in the weaning process called nationalism, they have not yet managed to undertake regional or federal solutions to their common problems of isolation and poverty. As independent states, the Malagasy Republic and Mauritius both have exemplified a "bridging" role that the Indian Ocean region might play between Africa and Asia, but they have yet to displace many of the prevailing connections between that region and Europe. Yet their respective demographies are appropriate to the role, and their policies have gradually swung toward the African bridgehead as the Indian Ocean zone becomes increasingly entangled in offshore political games that involve major powers from Suez to Cape Town.

Ambiguities in the Comorian process of decolonization have brought these most "African" of all the islands into prominence as a test of French security intentions, of African willingness to help (or indeed to intervene), of Great Power tolerance, and of the durability of the Creole myth in a highly diverse region.

France may have lost its power to inhibit the Comoros from striking too close a rapport with "revolutionary" Zanzibar, Madagascar, or Libya. But it can still call the tune in the Creole dependency, Réunion, and, so far, retains Mayotte. The Seychelles' stability, and its relationship with Africa, depend both on the economics of tourism and on the short memories and resultant mutual good feelings between leaders of the coalition. The Europeans have lost initiative in the Malagasy Republic and in Mauritius, two nations with strong Asian heritage and still stronger contemporary inclinations toward reconciliation with Africa. It is probably true that such reconciliation will remain largely symbolic until currents of economic interaction have been created between the islands and the continental societies. Nevertheless, such symbolism has been extraordinarily important in making those societies what they are, and "Africa" as a set of concepts may play a vital part in deciding autonomous institutions and international identity for the uneven evolution of the Western Indian Ocean.

NOTES

1. L. Rubin and B. Weinstein, Introduction to African Politics: A Continental Approach (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 5.

2. The Comoros, Réunion and the Seychelles should logically have been included in the Rubin and Weinstein book at pp. 305-06.

3. Elisa Daggs, All Africa: All Its Political Entities of Independent or Other Status (New York: Hastings House, 1970).

4. Colin Legum, ed., Africa Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents (London: Rex Collings, through 1974).

5. See Philip M. Allen, Self-Determination in the Western Indian Ocean (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, International Conciliation Series no. 560, November 1966), pp. 50-62.

6. For example, "The Eastern Islands," in A. B. Mountjoy and C. Embleton, Africa: A New Geographical Survey (New York: Praeger, 1967), Part VIII.

7. G. P. Murdock, Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 309.

8. Ibid. See also Nigel Heseltine, Madagascar (New York: Praeger, 1971), chs. 2 and 3; Hubert Deschamps, Histoire de Madagascar (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1961), pp. 13-59.

9. G. Lionnet, The Seychelles (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1972).

10. D. Kimble, A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 299.

11. Barbara Dubins, "A Political History of the Comoro Islands, 1795-1886" (Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1972); also Deschamps, Histoire de Madagascar, pp. 97-105.

12. Basil Davidson, The African Slave Trade: Precolonial History, 1450-1850 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961), p. 180.

13. For a full treatment of Madagascar's current political setting, see Philip M. Allen, "The Malagasy Republic: The Authenticity of Recovery," in John M. Ostheimer, ed., Political Development of the Western Indian Ocean Islands (New York: Praeger, 1975), ch. 3; see also idem, "Madagascar and OCAM: The Insular Approach to Regionalism," Africa Report 11 (January 1966): 13-18.

14. Nouvelles Malgaches Quotidiennes (Tananarive), November 7, 1965. Translation by Philip M. Allen.

15. Siradiou Diallo, "Didier Ratsiraka: Nous sommes des Africains à part entière," Jeune Afrique, no. 698, May 25, 1974, pp. 26-27. Translation by the authors.

16. For greater detail on Mauritian political change, see Philip M. Allen, "Mauritius: The Ile de France Returns," in Ostheimer, Political Development, ch. 8.

17. A fuller treatment of the Seychelles' move toward independence is found in John M. Ostheimer, "The Seychelles: Politics in the Islands of Love," Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 13 (July 1975): 174-92; see also his "Independence Politics in the Seychelles," in Ostheimer, Political Development, ch. 7.

18. Though hard to locate in the United States, the best sources for following Seychelles politics are the major party weekly papers, the SPUP's The People and the SDP's Seychelles Weekly, together with the Government daily, the Seychelles Bulletin. All are published in Port Victoria.

19. United Nations Committee on Decolonization (May 17, 1974).

20. Seychelles Weekly, October 16, 1974.

21. Two general surveys of Comorian politics are John M. Ostheimer, "Political Development in Comoros," The African Review, 3 (1973),: 491-506, and his "The politics of Comorian Independence," in Ostheimer, Political Development, ch. 4.

22. Dorothy Pickles, The Fifth French Republic: Institutions and Politics (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 161.

23. The People, November 15, 1972.

24. Réunion's current politics is the subject of John M. Ostheimer's Réunion: France's Remaining Bastion," in his Political Development, ch. 5.

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